



Statement of the National Association of State Fire Marshals

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's
Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous
Materials

Chairwoman Corrine Brown and Ranking Member Bill Shuster
Hearing on:
"Pipeline Safety Public Awareness and Education"

Presented by
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Chairwoman Brown and Ranking Member Shuster, thank you for allowing the National Association of State Fire Marshals to testify today before your Subcommittee. My name is Peter O'Rourke. I serve as the Director of Energy Programs for the National Association of State Fire Marshals and have worked with the Association for the past 15 years.

The National Association of State Fire Marshals represents the most senior fire officials in each State. Our membership is unique in that many State Fire Marshals are sworn law enforcement personnel, giving our organization a blended fire and law enforcement perspective. Most of our State Fire Marshals, however, began their careers in the fire house, working their way up the ranks, eventually achieving the highest state-level fire service position. Among the many duties of a state fire marshal, one of the most important is fire prevention. As such, incident prevention is a central focus in all our programs, including pipeline safety.

The National Association of State Fire Marshals has been actively involved in pipeline education and safety since 2002, when we entered into a Partnership for Excellence in Pipeline Safety with the US Department of Transportation's (DOT) now-Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration. The State Fire Marshals' Partnership with US DOT also focused on liquefied natural gas (or LNG) safety, pipeline High Consequence Areas, and hazardous materials safety. But the foundation of the Partnership is a training program called *Pipeline Emergencies*.

The *Pipeline Emergencies* program offers a comprehensive training curriculum that covers liquid and gas, transmission and distribution pipelines from both operations and emergency response perspectives. It was developed in cooperation with subject matter experts in emergency response, pipeline operations, underground safety (like the Common Ground Alliance), citizen safety and fire training. We brought all the players together in order to address the multitude of concerns about pipeline safety – but at its core, the program remains an emergency response training curriculum.

The unambiguous priority for State Fire Marshals is to ensure that all fire fighters, in particular volunteers, receive comprehensive fire prevention and suppression training. Through this important training, fire fighters will respond safely and appropriately to accidents and incidents. A recent pipeline accident just this month, in McDuffie County, Georgia offers a real-life example. On July 5th, a propane pipeline was ruptured, killing one person and injuring others. Having never responded to an actual pipeline incident, but having trained regularly, the fire department knew what to do and how to respond. According to Fire Chief Bruce Tanner: pipeline safety training “was a tremendous help... [the incident] was a tragedy as it is, but it could have been a lot worse”.

The *Pipeline Emergencies* training program was developed in 2004, and we have shipped almost 45,000 training packages to both public safety agencies and the pipeline industry. The U.S. Department of Transportation has paid the cost of shipping *Pipeline Emergencies* to public safety officials, and there is no purchase fee for any public safety organization that requests copies of the curriculum. In addition, we have trained more than 1,000 certified fire instructors in all 50 states.

The timing of today's hearing is opportune. One of the limitations of our current *Pipeline Emergencies* training program has been that it is available only in hard copy and disseminated through a broad network of emergency response organizations. This has helped to ensure that the public safety community is saturated with the training program, but it has limited our ability to measure and tailor the program to meet individual needs.

Several months ago, however, the State Fire Marshals and US DOT agreed to update the training curriculum and, most important, make it available in an electronic format. We currently are reviewing the program scope and exploring funding opportunities for the comprehensive online Pipeline Safety Portal.

Fortunately, we are not facing any limitations related to technological capabilities. Well established platforms exist to deliver education programs electronically. These platforms are fully capable of measuring data relative to program reach, test results, geographic penetration and other important data points. Some of these platforms allow for integrated and multi-modal notification capabilities. With these capabilities, the State Fire Marshals and the pipeline industry could engage in measurable communications with public safety and other public officials regarding safety training, pipeline maintenance, high consequence area updates, and myriad other public awareness subjects. In addition to the "best in class" pipeline emergency training program, the Portal would include a measurable ability to enhance public awareness and notification efforts.

Most fire fighters receive training through their state and municipal fire academies, which are increasingly utilizing electronic media to deliver training. The State Fire Marshals are working closely with these academies to ensure that the method we select for an electronic pipeline training portal will fit well within their expanding capabilities. This is important because training emergency responders today requires flexibility of delivery in order to fit busy schedules, to be a training priority and to provide training to every emergency responder at no cost. Many fire fighters, particularly volunteers and those in rural areas are not able to travel regularly or even occasionally to fire academies. Instead, these fire fighters often rely on a limited number of trainers in a particular region. A flexible, web-based training and communications portal would reach many first responders, including fire, law enforcement and EMTs, and provide them with a level of training and information they do not regularly receive about specialized emergency risks such as pipelines. For those emergency responders without regular access to the Internet, the State Fire Marshals will offer the training program via CD, or it can be provided through print-on-demand capabilities.

We currently are reviewing the feasibility of this Portal approach. Sustained funding for a curriculum of this type is always a concern, as training cannot be switched on and off depending on availability of resources. It is imperative to continue the progress that the National Association of State Fire Marshals and DOT has made through the Pipeline Emergencies training program so that the country is prepared for future emergencies. In order to adequately maintain the public safety, the training necessary for new emergency responders entering the industry and to update the training curricula for new procedures and hazardous materials, we respectfully request that your Subcommittee authorize funding for Pipeline Emergencies training for a multi-year period.

The National Association of State Fire Marshals remains committed to providing pipeline safety training and awareness to the nation's emergency responders. Hearings like this are essential to sharpening the country's focus on these so often preventable accidents. Public awareness and education, as well as emergency responder training, are vital components of a pipeline safety program. Our association and our membership stand ready to provide greater assistance to this Subcommittee, the Executive Branch, and our state and local partners. Again, I thank you personally and on behalf of the National Association of State Fire Marshals for this opportunity and am pleased to answer any questions.